



CONTRIBUTION OF ATD FOURTH WORLD TO THE STUDY ON THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN HUMANITARIAN SITUATIONS

1. The main challenges in protecting the rights of the child in humanitarian situations.

When faced with natural disasters, which require a rapid response, one of the main challenges is to respond to the urgency of the situation while at the same time ensuring to the extent possible an accurate assessment of the needs of the various groups affected. Universality and non-discrimination are two of the main principles of human rights instruments. And yet all too often, in humanitarian situations, the response strategies that are developed overlook the needs of particular groups of children, and therefore unintentionally result in indirect discrimination and lack of universal access to the required services.

One of the groups that often suffers from systemic discrimination are children living in extreme poverty. In the Philippines, for example, where rising sea levels are exacerbating the impact of typhoons and flooding on the local population, the government has launched a massive relocation programme for the 100,000 estimated households living in dangerous locations in Manila, such as under the bridges that flow through the city. In order to apply for relocation, however, the number of documents required have been daunting and costly for the poorest of families: copies of either birth registrations or certification of no birth record for every member of the family as a minimum, and sometimes additional documents depending on the circumstances. The level of literacy required to fill up the application forms represent an additional obstacle for families living in extreme poverty. And yet the entire shantytown is destroyed once the date for the relocation has been passed. Forced to move, and having lost much of their belongings, the families' sources of earnings and their support system are disrupted, and the children's schooling is interrupted.¹

There are also instances when the discrimination is intentional. For example, after the Haiti earthquake of 2010, the international organizations which coordinated the emergency aid declared certain zones as 'no-go zones' because they were considered to be dangerous due to the presence of gangs. And yet they were some of the zones that were the hardest hit, and NGOs were active in those zones which could have served as links between the communities and the international aid organizations. ATD Fourth World, for example, which had long been active in one of the

¹ Diana Faujour Skelton, *Artisans of Peace Overcoming Poverty*, Vol. 2, ATD Fourth World, 2016, pp. 13-58.

‘no-go’ zones, was concerned about the number of children under the age of six who desperately needed the nutritional supplements that were part of the food aid. The team worked with young people from the community to canvass the area, identifying 3500 families with children 0-6.²

A second challenge is to take into consideration the linkages between different sectors. For example, again in Haiti, two years after the earthquake the lack of clean water and sanitation was having a devastating impact not only on the children’s health and nutritional status, but also on their access to education. As noted in a UNICEF report, the high mortality rate – one in 13 children was dying before the age of 5 – was due to preventable diseases such as diarrhea. In addition, children often missed school because they were needed to fetch water or dropped out in order to avoid what were rightly considered to be high-risk sanitation installations.³

A third challenge is to ensure that families are kept together, or if separated, are reunited to the extent possible. In violation of Article 21 of the CRC, after the Haiti earthquake, there were many cases where families, wanting to ensure the best possible care for their children until their situation improved, entrusted them to institutions that later gave them up for international adoption, without the parents’ informed consent.

2. Examples of good practices undertaken to protect the rights of the child in humanitarian situations.

Example 1: Training of Social and Cultural Mediators to work with children in marginalized communities

In the Central African Republic, ATD partnered with the National Agency for Vocational Training and Employment (*l'Agence Centrafricaine pour la Formation Professionnelle et l'Emploi - ACFPE*), the *Alliance française*, and the University of Bangui to implement a training programme to help heal the trauma caused by devastating years of conflict. “Social and Cultural Mediation” is a new work-and-study course for a profession which did not exist previously. Key trainers in the effort were people who themselves came from marginalized communities.

In the course, students develop their capacity to create (or renew) social ties for people who are mired in the daily violence engendered by the years of internal conflict. The National Agency for Vocational Training and Employment, in conjunction with the University of Bangui, are in charge of developing the curriculum and ensuring certification of acquired skills. The fieldwork is supervised by several non-profits working in the areas of public health or special education for vulnerable young people. The apprentice “social and cultural mediators” engage people in the marketplace, in non-profit organizations, in health clinics, at schools, in youth clubs, through the media, or during interactions with local authorities. The Ministry of Education is interested in taking the programme one step further by connecting the programme to schools in disadvantaged zones in order to create new bonds between families, schools, and the surrounding community.⁴

² See <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/world-humanitarian-summit-disaster-relief-must-respect-dignity-long-term-vision/> and <https://www.editionsquartmonde.org/rqm/document.php?id=5049#tocto1>

³ UNICEF, "Les enfants d’Haïti : deux ans après - Qu’est-ce qui change ? Qui participe au changement ?," 2012, p. 13. See https://www.unicef.org/lac/haiti_2yearsReportFR.pdf

⁴ See <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/inventing-new-profession-central-african-republic-social-cultural-mediators/>

Once they have finished their training, the young people are placed through a programme called “Building the Future” - a partnership between ATD Quart Monde and the ACFPE. Some are now working with children living on the streets, while others are providing support to women who face difficulties because of their minority Muslim status or because the men in their family have left the community. Others are working in literacy and sewing classes, or in infant day care centres that enable women to return to work.

Still other trainees have been hired by community development non-profits involved in protecting women and children from violence, and reuniting former child soldiers with their families. They are also eligible for mediation jobs in areas of the country where citizens are returning after living in refugee camps both inside and outside CAR. The trainees are all working to create spaces where social bonds can be reconstructed and communities become whole again.

The Advisory Group is currently working to establish “Social and Cultural Mediation” as a recognized field in the Central African Republic so that it can become an established profession.⁵

Example 2: A programme for street children, as a means to prevent their recruitment as child soldiers

In CAR, the local NGO “*La Voix du Coeur*,” has been working with street children since 1994. It provides psycho-social support and access to health care, organizes educational and vocational training opportunities, integrates children into the school system, and works to reintegrate the children back into their families. Many of these activities are run by local volunteers. During the recent crisis, the programme provided a space where children could talk about their experiences, and work towards reconciliation rather than revenge. It also helped to prevent street children from joining an armed group, by maintaining their focus on education and training as providing the best hope for the future.⁶

Example 3: Identifying and involving NGOs with local knowledge of vulnerable groups

As mentioned under Question 1, after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, a neighbourhood of 25,000 people was sidelined by aid agencies as a ‘no-go’ zone. In order to bring in much-needed food, ATD teamed up with Action Against Hunger to organize a distribution of nutritional support for children under 6. As recounted by an ATD member who was on the spot at the time:

“...in order to ensure that every single child would be reached, ...climbing through the rubble,... local young people carried out a census to find out how everyone was and to note down every child’s name. After this census-taking, the distribution took place. It took many days, but occurred in a completely calm atmosphere. The young people were there to reassure each parent that there would be enough to go around for all young children, with no one left out. Everyone was proud that there was no violence and no need for peacekeepers, who are sometimes used when a group carrying out a distribution is afraid they will not have enough to go around.

⁵ See <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/learning-leave-no-one-behind/>

⁶ See <http://fondationvoixducoeur.net/fr/qui-sommes-nous.html> and <http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/partage-des-savoirs-a-la-voix-du/>

That procedure of the census-taking was the only way to ensure that no one would be left out — however foreign donors considered it too slow, and refused to fund a second distribution. That was heartrending! The way that aid is usually distributed is completely indiscriminate, with no consideration for the number of people present. This creates tension, pushing the strongest people to fight to get more, and leaving the most vulnerable people empty-handed.”⁷

Likewise, in Bangui, in CAR, in one emergency camp of 100,000, the humanitarian aid NGOs drew on the knowledge and experience of the local members of ATD to reach out to the children of the most vulnerable families.⁸

3. Specific practices that aim to guarantee the right of the child to participate and to be heard (UNCRC Article 12) in humanitarian situations.

In the aim of ensuring that the views of children who are socially excluded are also heard in humanitarian situations, the following measures will need to be adopted.

a. *Investing the time required:* time is essential to building mutual trust and confidence among children who have subjected to a history of marginalization. It takes time to understand their needs and aspirations, and also to allow them to trust the reasons for one’s presence. They will need opportunities to build up confidence – confidence in articulating their thoughts and views, in defending their right to hold views and to have a voice, and in overcoming fear or hostility toward those in power. They need to know that they are really being listened to and that their contributions are valued. Token participation with no real impact on the final decisions that are made will destroy any possibility for developing trust.

The most frequent shortcomings of development projects are the tight limitations on time, and conditions for funding that do not allow for genuine participation. The pressure for short-term results is an obstacle to reaching the most excluded children, because it does not take account of the time and human resources necessary to build an in-depth knowledge of their situation and to create the conditions in which they feel safe in expressing their views.

b. *Commitment to working together:* both the adults and the children need to realize how complementary each one is to the others and to accept that they be influenced by one another. This approach of working and thinking together is effective in programmes and projects where each participant can acquire specific knowledge or know-how and can be proud of his or her efforts and contributions. In the experience of ATD Fourth World, often this kind of exchange can be fostered through cultural activities that allow children to express themselves other than through words, such as through drawings and theatre. This is especially true when the children have suffered from trauma of different kinds.

c. *Two-way skill development:* all those involved need to be supported in the development of the skills required to work together. The poorest children, who are not used to having their views solicited, need support in developing the tools to analyze their rights, and to take on

⁷ See <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/world-humanitarian-summit-disaster-relief-must-respect-dignity-long-term-vision/>

⁸ Ibid.

responsibilities. Care must be taken not to rely on the most dynamic participants in such a way that their success might humiliate others. The project workers also need to be sensitized to the approaches required in order to build personal relationships with the children.

d. Consensus building and broad-based participation: The special attention required in order to reach the most excluded children does not mean exclusivity. The efforts of the poorest children and their families to respond to the humanitarian situation are not sustainable if they are not noticed and backed by other segments of society. It is therefore important that uplifting the poorest be integrated into the common concerns of the whole community and that partnership with them be established as a goal at the start of a project. Equally important are involving the poorest children and young people in planning for the transition from the humanitarian crisis to long-term development. Because of the linkages between children's rights, cross-sectoral co-operation between organizations working in a range of areas is a key factor to success in sustainable improvements in the lives of the most vulnerable children.

e. Monitoring and evaluation: project assessment often depends too heavily on quantitative information. Qualitative indicators should also be used, that are developed with the target populations.

Young people from the local community can serve as excellent agents for helping to reach out to the most vulnerable children. Because they are familiar with the families, and have recently moved out of childhood themselves, they are often well placed to be trusted by the children and their parents. With proper guidance, they can be effective in developing a dialogue with the children in order to provide input in the design, implementation, and monitoring of responses to humanitarian situations.

The experiences described above from CAR and Haiti also demonstrate that, because they know the local community, they can ensure that no children are overlooked in a mapping of needs as well as resources and capacities for responding to the situation.

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